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Testimony of Connecticut Water Company
Public Health Committee
March 7, 2016

RB 5540 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE WATER PLAN

Connecticut Water Company is pleased to provide comments in support of ***RB 5540 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE WATER PLAN***. We thank the committee for raising the bill and urge its adoption as an important step to drive success in the development of a State Water Plan, as required by PA 14-163.

As a public water utility, Connecticut Water serves approximately 90,000 customers or 300,000 people in 56 towns in Connecticut. We have long been stewards of the environment and strive to ensure that water resources are protected and our water utility operations are sustainable. We have been involved with various stakeholder groups over the years, working together to meaningful laws and regulations that balance all water resource interests.

We supported the passage of PA 14-163 that called for the development of a State Water Plan and have been actively involved in various stakeholder groups and committees, to support the efforts of the Water Planning Council (WPC) to develop a State Water Plan. We join with the various stakeholders who want to ensure that the plan is balanced and will provide adequate water supplies to meet the public health and safety needs of our residents, and support smart economic development in the state, while protecting the environment, and providing recreational opportunities.

As the process has unfolded, concerns have been raised by the water utilities, environmental advocates, and other representatives on the Water Planning Council Advisory Group (convened pursuant to Section 25-33o of the CGS) about the current approval process for the plan. The bill before you would address the following concerns with the current approval process that have been identified by those stakeholders:

- If the legislature fails to act to approve or reject the plan within 60 days, the plan would be deemed to be approved. It is troubling that no action could result in approval of something so important to the state. Further, the timeline is not limited to 60 days when the legislature is in session, so it is entirely possible the time could lapse unintentionally and the plan deemed approved – without any legislative review.

- After public hearing(s) on the plan submitted by the Water Planning Council, the joint standing committees may approve, reject, or modify the plan before it goes to the General Assembly for adoption. Carefully balanced provisions included in the plan could be revised or removed and significantly change the plan that is ultimately adopted by the legislature. There is no mechanism for any concerns or changes recommended by the Committees to be addressed or further reviewed by the WPC or the stakeholders involved in developing the plan. We would suggest the process be revised to return the plan to the WPC, similar to the process for the adoption of a regulation.

The proposed changes in the RB 5540 still provide timelines for action and safeguards against unreasonable delays. They provide for the plan to only be deemed approved if adopted by an affirmative action of General Assembly and not by default if the time lapses.

We don't believe the changes will significantly delay the process but will serve to increase stakeholder involvement, promote greater buy in, and improve the final plan and the intended outcome.

The stakeholders feel strongly that now is the time to make changes to the approval process, before the plan is drafted, and before various parties might find an advantage to a particular aspect of the approval process. It seems quite compelling that there are shared views and alignment of the broad group of stakeholders in support of the proposed change.

We appreciate your interest and urge your support of RB 5540. We stand ready to work with the Committee, the Water Planning Council and other stakeholders if there should be any suggested changes to the bill. Thank you.